
Experto credite. If we ought to trust an expert, who is more expert than Richard Tarrant, who for so many years has jousted in the lists of Latin textual criticism? Not only his exemplary editions with commentary of Seneca’s *Agamemnon* (Cambridge 1976) and of *Aeneid* XII (Cambridge 2012), but above all the OCT of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (Oxford 2004), have made him a scholar especially entitled to instruct us on critical method. But this small volume of his aims not only to discuss the rules of the art of editing, but also to reflect on the practice of the scholars who dedicate themselves professionally to the task of emending the texts of classical Latin.

As is well known, there is no lack of advisory manuals which convey the fundamentals of this difficult and painstaking skill; we all know them and recommend them to our students when we teach them how to prepare a critical text of a Latin writer. And Tarrant follows them all in the general framing of his volume, adopting the canonical division of the material: a chapter on *recensio* and its problems, another on *emendatio*, another on removing interpolated elements from the text; we also find at the end ten pages explaining how to read an *apparatus criticus*. But Tarrant has chosen the form of the essay rather than that of the manual. The mark of the essay is its characteristic mixture of different elements – argument, soliloquy, critical analysis, the giving of examples, a brief character sketch dedicated to this or that person, plus anecdote and aphorism – above all, a clear desire for dialogue. I think I do not exaggerate when I say that in reading it I thought of Francis Bacon, the very founder of the distinguished Anglo-Saxon essay tradition; in these pages I recognised the same impersonal wisdom, the same detachment, and simultaneously the same sense of the relativist status of every principle and every position taken.

Experience has conferred on Tarrant the virtue of practical observation without illusion. He has learned from his critical labours to follow a reading practice of methodical doubt, and he has become tolerant and realistic; in effect, he invites us to recognise the limits of our certainties. The age of Titans is now past, the age of characters like Lachmann, eponymous hero of a whole method, a hero even given the blessing of Housman, so difficult to please. If Karl Lachmann is the prototype of the ‘heroic editor’, his virtues mark all those who belong to the mythical age: «acute intelligence, total dedication to editorial work on a wide range of texts, quickness to suspect the text as transmitted in manuscripts, fertility in conjecture, confidence in judgement, and authoritativeness in expression» (p. 19).

That was the age of methodological certainties; the ideal model of the exact sciences functioned as a talisman possessed of magic powers. In this period, perhaps not even the positivist physicists and natural scientists had as much confidence in scientific method as their classical counterparts. While the hypotheses of the former were subject to experiments which could from time to time disprove them with the force of concrete data, the hypotheses of the latter were only rarely the object of so clear a refutation. Tarrant does not conceal that, after the end of the heroic age, «at the moment […] the most that an edition can aim to accomplish is to report accurately the essential manuscript evidence and faithfully to reflect the present state of understanding of the text, in order to serve as an instrument of research and a basis for further discussion. […] As a result, every important edition is at the same time a point of arrival and a point of departure» (p. 41).
When they engage in argument, critics frequently conclude by saying «by which it is demonstrated», but this is merely a naive act of arrogance. So-called scholarly demonstration cannot aspire to the rigour of a mathematical demonstration; at the most it can claim a certain plausibility, occasionally even probability. Tarrant is wholly aware of this aspect of criticism, from which he starts in constructing (pp. 30-48) an original form of critical discourse concerning what he calls «the rhetoric of textual criticism». There are some very enjoyable pages here, whether for their breadth of vision or their felicity of expression, shot through as they are with a detached irony: the critical balance with which Tarrant places himself au-dessus de la mêlée can only be appreciated. This rhetoric is the rhetoric of outrage, that with which scholars condemn ‘corrupt’ passages, as if they see themselves as judges in defence of a violated truth; but it is also the rhetoric of scholar-advocates who ‘defend’ misunderstood innocence; it is the rhetoric of illness which prescribes remedies for texts which need to be ‘healed’; it is the notarial rhetoric which discovers that ‘spurious’ or ‘inauthentic’ lines have been illegitimately introduced by cunning forgers.

This is, so to speak, the objective aspect of what Tarrant calls the rhetoric of textual criticism: «To classify textual criticism as a form of rhetoric is a way of highlighting the fact that its arguments depend on persuasion rather than demonstration. Textual critics cannot prove that their choices are correct; the most they can hope to do is lead their readers to believe that those choices are the best available ones» (p. 41). But there is also a subjective aspect, and here I refer to the rhetoric used by interested parties – editors and textual critics – when they debate their texts. Rhetoric, as is well known, serves to make plausible the reasons for an argument, to convince one’s interlocutor, and this is why rhetoric (as the Socrates of the Platonic Gorgias might maliciously suggest) can sometimes be close to sophistic discourse.

Nor is it to be denied that in some cases the art of persuasion can turn into intimidation; in order to conquer, indeed, it must abuse its power and impose itself on the reasonings of others. On this topic Tarrant offers here and there a collection of the better known malicious expressions of Housman, dreamed up to entertain his friends and excoriate his enemies, brilliant and treacherous, occasionally capable of compressing well-tested truths of method into thunderous formulations. Amongst these the best known is that to be found in the preface to his edition of Lucan: «It would not be true to say that all conservative scholars are stupid, but it is very near the truth to say that all stupid scholars are conservative». If this phrase is reread with some perspective, it can be seen that it is a true masterpiece of the rhetorical art: in order to make his judgement acceptable, Housman does not use his normal peremptory tone, but feigns a kind of indecision. By doing this he takes on a mode of expression that allows an implacable condemnation to pass for an eirenical reflection. Masterly!

If for Horace the genus uatum is irritabile, the race of critics is even more so, and not only when they inveigh against inaccurate copyists or insidious interpolators, but above all when they exercise their «rhetoric of self-affirmation» against fellow editors and critics. Some (this is precisely the ‘heroic’ model of the European humanistic tradition) are true and proper subductisupercilicarptores: they employ towards the suggestions of others a tone of disdainful complacency so as to reinforce the authority of their own arguments. But I think that often many of them are too concerned to refute the ideas of differently-minded colleagues to appreciate the true nature of the problems from which the text actually suffers.
Once he has established that an appeal to rhetoric is fundamental to scholarly argument, Tarrant asks himself which rhetorical mode is especially appropriate to textual criticism in a post-heroic age such as ours (p. 43). Some years ago he wrote (in Suppl. Vol. 23 of the Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society, 1999, pp. 288-300) a *synkrisis* between two outstanding masters of textual criticism from past centuries, Nicolaas Heinsius and Richard Bentley. The comparison is indeed instructive. It is true that perhaps Tarrant engages in some affectionate overvaluation in setting his beloved Heinsius, the hero of Ovidian studies, against the incomparable Bentley: it is more than legitimate to compare two diverse styles of textual criticism – the affable and reasonable Heinsius on one side, on the other the arrogant and lofty Bentley – but we should also recall that, though numerous great scholars before Bentley had made admirable conjectures, Bentley was, for his part, proudly conscious not of having advanced conjectures, but of providing solutions to so many difficult problems, and often definitive solutions (on the *Selbstgefühl* of Bentley see the Swiss scholar Jacob A. Mähly, ‘Richard Bentley. Eine Biographie’, Leipzig 1868, p. 19). Some suggestions by Bentley are in fact real and actual acquisitions: with him was truly inaugurated a new era of textual criticism, reaching a critical level never again attained and probably never again attainable.

Bentley’s rhetoric was that of the accuser, veering towards outrage; his passionate temperament drove him towards denunciation; in him the errors of scribes provoked disgust, while the obtuseness of other critics kindled animosity. Very different was the critical lexicon of Heinsius, who rather gravitated towards commendation (it should not be forgotten that he was also a diplomat). To absolute superlatives he preferred relative comparatives (*melius*, *uerius*, *eleganter*), *liotes* (non male) and moderated formulations (*probe*, *quod arridet*, malum): his language of approbation, where possible, inclined towards cordial appreciation. But it is not just a case of two different temperaments: the fact is that Heinsius was a marvellous workman, but Bentley was a marvellous artist. Nevertheless, Tarrant concludes with a consideration which can be wholly shared: «If there is a rhetoric appropriate to a post-heroic textual criticism, I believe it will resemble the style of Heinsius more than that of Bentley. In fact, from this point of view, Heinsius could be called, paradoxically, a post-heroic hero, since his emphasis on multiple possibilities foreshadows the current move away from dogmatic certainty» (p. 47).

Heinsius can also be taken as a good model for stemmatic method and the *constitutio textus*. Pre-Lachmannian in time, he can also be described as a good instance of post-Lachmannian scholarship, at least in the sense that his way of treating variants today seems – especially in the case of traditions which are ‘open’ or somehow complex – more productive than what can be guaranteed by rigorous stemmatic analysis: his is an eclectic method, which seems more flexible in its strategies, more uninhibited in the choice of editorial criteria. On the other hand, Tarrant himself, as much as he admits to feeling sceptical when faced by the principle of a purely Lachmannian *recensio* founded on as many manuscripts as possible, insists on confirming that «from a logical standpoint, complete collation is the only defensible approach, but in most cases that is a counsel of perfection rather than a feasible policy» (p. 55).

The chapter on *recensio* is a real jewel of clarity, with abundant examples, taken particularly from the critical text of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; and some supplementary considerations are proposed for when an editor faces equally well attested readings: the element of
the author’s *usus scribendi*, the criterion of the *lectio difficilior*, the shrewd recognition of a *lectio netustior* transmitted instead as a *lectio recentior*. In these pages the ‘stemmatic’ or genealogical method of analysis – which can also be called the ‘method of shared errors’ – demonstrates its full imperious logic. Yet Tarrant does not omit to report disconsolately how much work remains to finally ensure the full exploration of so many traditions of which our knowledge is only provisional: «a large number of later manuscripts have not in fact been inspected» (p. 55). All the admirers of the indefatigable explorations of Michael Reeve know how true this is. But here I should like to quote Tarrant’s conclusion towards the end of the chapter on *recensio* – a kind of distillation of his experience as a long-time editor: «Even in the most orderly of traditions, the application of stemmatic reasoning is an exercise in judgement, not a set of mechanically determined steps; in less tidy traditions the recourse to editorial judgement becomes still more important» (p. 64). It is wholly impossible to dissent from this.

The pages dedicated to ‘conjecture’ (pp. 65-84) are rendered particularly attractive by an intensification of essayistic colour: if it is true to say that this is the height of editorial acumen, it is also the moment most liable to generate dissent. On this topic I could have wished that in this chapter – the most delicate chapter, aimed as it is at colliding with the sensibilities of conservative critics – Tarrant had reserved particular space for an accident of manuscript traditions that Pasquali, and even more indeed Scevola Mariotti, called ‘cryptocorruption’: this refers to a type of damage that the text may have undergone without visible traces remaining, and which almost always consists in a trivialisation of the genuine reading; the text seems to yield sense in a certain way, but in fact the style (as Havet said) «piétine». Conservative critics claim that every suspicion raised by sceptics is a violation of the integrity of the transmitted text, and to believe that correction itself is tantamount to arbitrary manipulation and is therefore to be condemned. Truth to tell, it should be strongly maintained that our texts, which have indeed gained much from criticism *ope ingenii*, still require many improving interventions, many more than is commonly believed; many are the cruces which need to be challenged, and many too are the ‘cryptocorruptions’ embedded in texts.

The conjecturer’s skill sometimes receives miraculous reward: the goddess Tyche and the Muse of textual conjecture (named Eustochia by Nisbet) can work benignly together to ensure that a papyrus or an unknown early medieval manuscript provides unexpected confirmation of the critic’s intuition. Diggle (‘The Textual Tradition of Euripides’ *Orestes*, Oxford 1991, pp. 162-63) cites various examples of conjectures confirmed by medieval MSS unknown to the scholars who proposed them. Cases of this kind are obviously much more common for Greek literature given the greater quantity of Greek papyri preserved than Latin. Pasquali (‘Storia della tradizione e critica del testo’, Firenze 1952, p. 283) discussed some examples of conjectures, including a very fine one by P. P. Dobree in Demosthenes *De falsa legatione* 19, 280, 25, which removed *ope ingenii* an absurd καί which is in fact not to be found in P. Oxy. 1094. One can also recall the recent study of P. J. Finglass (‘I papiri di Eschilo e di Sofocle’, curr. G. Bastianini-A. Casanova, Firenze 2013, pp. 33-51), which examines a vast mass of readings confirmed by papyri, readings advanced as conjectures by the critics of the past, such as Musgrave, Pearson, W. S. Barrett, Campbell, or Heath. It only remains to ask how many other conjectures need to await the discovery of a papyrus for editors to recognise their value.

Examples of this type could be multiplied, but I mention only one that I find spectacular, not only for the exceptional capacity of discernment demonstrated by the author, Emil Baehrens, but also because the conjecture’s confirmation derives from a Latin papyrus, one of the few that has survived to us (amongst other things, an illuminating example of cryp-
tocorruption is embedded in the same passage). At *Aen.* 4, 423, in the speech of Dido to her sister Anna, all the manuscripts and the indirect tradition of Servius Danielis and Nonius Marcellus read *sola uiri mollis aditus et tempora noras*. In the immediately preceding lines the desperate queen had said *sola nam perfidus ille te colere, arcanos etiam tibi credere sensus*. Baehrens concludes that line 423 as transmitted appears to be a pointless repetition of the previous sentence, in so far as it too refers to the past experiences of Anna (*sola… noras*); the situation in context demands instead that Dido intends to entrust to her sister a commission to be carried out in the immediate future. Indeed, here the queen can only say ‘thanks to your previous familiarity, you *will* know (or *will be able to know*) the right kind of flattery to use and the most opportune moment to approach Aeneas’. Such was Baehrens’ reasoning, which led him to correct *noras* to *noris*. As if by magic, the text regains its full sense; the conjecture *noris* is confirmed by Pap. Colt Nessana 2.1 [Pack n. 2939].

Even more than conjecture, deletions of parts or words interpolated in the text rouse opposition amongst conservative critics. And Tarrant himself, as editor of the OCT Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, has found himself more than once accused of doing violence to the manuscript tradition; but, as he modestly reports, of the one hundred or so excisions he has proposed in Ovid’s poem, at least a quarter have been accepted with equanimity even by reluctant reviewers. This can undoubtedly be considered a pretty satisfactory proportion (p. 87). For years Tarrant has been debating with himself about interpolations, and we owe to him an intelligent classification of this phenomenon. He has distinguished between three different categories which correspond to three different motivations: emendation, annotation, and collaboration. More often than is generally believed, he understands that the copyist banalises an author’s vocabulary when it seems too difficult, or introduces originally extraneous elements into the main body of the text, for example explanations or notes, in short the superfluities which come to be placed in the margins of the page or between its lines; these are arbitrary supplements, illicit integrations, indeed alterations of the authentic text. Once introduced into the text, even interpolations like these are then transmitted, since in a sequence of successive copyings they come to be absorbed into the original text as if they were authentic elements. Then it is the task of scholarship to flush them out, to diagnose them as apocryphal, and so expel them from the text.

I sympathise with the effort applied by Tarrant to interpret collaborative interpolation as an especially active form of reader response: he understands, that every reader feels the need to finish the work that the author has failed to finish. The idea is felicitious in itself: «it removes interpolation from the realm of forgery or impersonation to which it has often been assigned and seeks to understand it as a form of emulation» (p. 88). Thus the sin of forgery becomes as it were a sin of enthusiasm, and thus in practice confers only moderate censure on the interpolator. But I would not like it to be forgotten how many other interpolations are not derived from innocent imitation but are rather determined by the intention to deceive – an ideological or apologetic intention, like that for example of the manufacturer of the so-called ‘comma Joanneum’ (found in the first epistle of John, Chapter 5, verses 7-8), which is the only passage in the whole of Holy Scripture in which allusion is made to the Trinity: it is only in this passage that the Holy Spirit is associated with the Father and the Son. It stands to reason that this supplement is unacceptable, since it is missing in all the oldest manuscripts. The great humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam, more driven by scholarly rigour than intimidated by the foreseeable theological consequences, established that this brief sentence was an interpolation, probably deriving from fourth-century Spain and introduced in just the right place to combat the Arian heresy (which was refuted precisely through the imposition of the doctrine of the Trinity). Working from
Erasmus’ deletion, the Spanish humanist Michele Serveto wrote his ‘De Trinitatis erroribus’ and as a result was burned alive as a heretic for the offence of resisting an interpolation. Tarrant will surely not expect still to breed scholars of such courage.

Before I end, a small note of dissent, which I would do better to conceal if I merely wished to avoid the accusation of acting like Cicero pro domo sua. I say first that for my part I would not feel insulted to designate myself an interpolation-hunter, the term used with pejorative colour by critics averse to deletions; in my Teubner editions of Virgil there are many passages where I have felt obliged to athetise. But I cannot accept one excision proposed by Tarrant. On p. 90 he refers to his excellent commentary on Book XII of the Aeneid (above). Here lines 882-84 are bracketed. These three lines end the tirade of Juturna, in despair since she must resign herself to the inevitable death of her brother Turnus. Juturna’s rhesis consists of two parts: in the first (lines 872-881) she laments her own incapacity to provide aid, and recalls the gift of eternal life awarded her by Jupiter in exchange for her virginity, an accursed gift since it prevents her from following her brother in death. In the second – the lines under suspicion – Juturna asks herself what is left for her of her world once her beloved brother is lost, and finally wishes that the earth were able to open up and swallow her. Ribbeck suspected that lines 882-84 were the result of a pente mento intended by the poet to replace lines 879-881: he thought that they were in some sense a repetition of what went before. Taking his departure from Ribbeck’s suspicions, Tarrant judges that these three lines are the work of a zealous interpolator. I have replied to Ribbeck in my apparatus, writing «oratio re uera redundat, sed pathetica talis amplificatio tragico sermonis tumori congruere widetur». Now I reply to Tarrant. In fact the last part of the speech is vital for the structure of the tragic rhesis, in that it obsessively repeats (or at least seems to repeat) the idea of the immortality to which the heroine is condemned. Immortalis ego? is a restatement, though a sarcastic one, of the idea of eternal life granted by Jupiter; but the thought is voiced (this second time) on a note of disconsolate bitterness, and sounds like a sharp condemnation of the irresponsible selfishness of the father of the gods. ‘What is the use of immortality to me, who must continue to live after the loss of my brother with nothing left that is dear to me any more?’ Tarrant has not realised that to remove these lines means to remove this caustic derision and blasphemous protest from one of the many victims of divine cruelty (this cruelty of the gods is always compensated for by the pity of the poet). Let us consider the word meorum, so suspected by Tarrant; this is an unmistakable mark of the Virgilian idiotle, being one of those bacchic words (the genitive plural of the possessive: meorum, suorum, suarum, tuorum) which recur some forty times at the close of the Virgilian hexameter – but only in him – as an authentic sphragis of his style (a sphragis which would surely escape the notice of a hypothetical forger); see what I have written in ‘Critical Notes on Virgil’ (Berlin/Boston 2016, p. 86). On the redundancy and repetitiousness of tragic rheses (from Medea to Andromache, Ajax and Dido) it is enough to consult R. L. Fowler, ‘The Rhetoric of Desperation’, in Harvard St. in Class. Philology vol. 91 (1987), pp. 5-38. Tarrant’s error in this case is to have recourse to a ‘criticism of taste’; he has yielded to a subjective impression, founding it on a superficially rationalistic diagnosis. It is not only in psychoanalysis that rationalisation constitutes a risk, being a deceptive means of rejecting reality.

However I remain an admirer of this small book which will certainly have an impressive reception. It is a typical product of the healthy pragmatism which lies at the base of the best American culture of the last century. Tarrant invites his readers to take a fallibilist approach, showing himself always conscious that scholarly doctrines, without the claim of offering definitive truths, are only conjectures and interpretative hypotheses, destined from time to time to be refuted and overcome by observations which are more valid and more effective. Pragmatism has no dogmas, does not offer particular doctrines, it is only an attitude of research. It works above all because it is a method.

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